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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000046

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SUBJECT: BROKEN OIL TANKER FOULS TAIWAN EAST COAST

Classified By: Classified By: AIT/T Econ Chief Daniel Moore for reasons
1.4 b/d

11. (U) SUMMARY. On December 24, the 23,000 ton Maltese registry oil tanker Tzini lost power and ran aground on the coast of Eastern Taiwan, spewing about 130 tons of fuel oil and polluting fisheries areas along with a 9 km stretch of coast south of the port of Suao. The Taiwan Coast Guard (CG) and the Environmental Protection Agency (TEPA) have tried to control the spill with limited success. Taiwan has fined the ship owner and negotiations are continuing on damage compensation. TEPA has been criticized for its ineffectual response in this latest incident. Divided responsibilities among various agencies, the lack of effective enforcement measures and equipment to deal with such spills casts doubts on Taiwan's ability to deal with similar cases in the future.
END SUMMARY

OIL SPILL CONTAINED-- AFTER SEVERAL DAYS

12. (U) On Dec 24, Malta-registered Tzini ran aground in heavy seas as it sailed from Japan to Taiwan to pick up a cargo of cement. Two of its oil tanks broke, spilling about 130 tons of oil along the coast. As of Dec 28, the Taiwan Coast Guard, together with the Taiwan Environmental Protection Agency (TEPA) and local authorities, have partially contained the oil spill using oil booms. A drifting oil patch offshore is being cleaned by contractors at Tzini's expense. On Dec. 27, to prevent further leaks from the remaining 580 tons of oil onboard, the Tzini's owners had the ship towed (without permission) to deeper water, then to Suao Port for repairs. Tzini's oil spill is estimated to have caused at least NT\$50 million in damages to the fishery in the area (\$1.00 = NT32.00). Other estimates from Suao fishery experts put the figure at NT\$11 billion based on a five-year estimated cost of recovery to the fishery. Negotiations continue over the extent of Tzini's financial responsibility even as the authorities assess fines of NT\$1.5 million against the owner.

ENFORCEMENT OF OIL SPILLS--WEAK

13. (U) This latest oil spill is small compared with a previous 2001 episode when the Greek-registered vessel Amorgos sank off Kenting in southern Taiwan and seriously damaged coral reefs in the area. According to TEPA, the owners of Amorgos paid NT\$60 million for clean up costs, NT\$1.2 billion to fishery concerns, and only last year settled out of court for USD\$1.05 million for damage to the coral reefs. The failure to reach a comprehensive settlement on damage to the environment has been ascribed to a lack by

Taiwan of a credible assessment of environmental damage. In July 2006, an Indonesian-registered ship sank in Taiwan's northern waters with a cargo of banana and other oils. Clean-up progress has been slow but the owners are under notice to finish it by April 2008. In October 2005, a Korean registry ship sank 14 miles from Taoyuan with an unknown cargo. So far, despite fines of NT\$60 million the issue is unresolved because the owners disagree with the penalties and have not paid. This series of incidents accent the difficulty Taiwan authorities face when trying to enforce penalties on environmental violations in its coastal waters.

LATE RESPONSE WITH WRONG EQUIPMENT

¶4. (C) AIT contacted professor Chiu Wen-yan, an expert in ocean pollution at the Ocean University in Keelung about this latest oil spill. Chiu said the TEPA was at the scene shortly after the Tzini ran aground. However, when he took students to the site next day he failed to see any action. Chiu said that not only was the response inadequate but they also brought a coastal water oil boom which failed to contain the spill on the choppy seas. The oil booms are purchased by TEPA for Coast Guard use but cannot be carried by the CG patrol craft and need a special boat to bring them to the site of an oil spill. Furthermore, TEPA did not send teams underwater to survey the damage to the ecosystem and limited their observations to the surface. According to Chiu, coastal air patrols, which can detect the source of oil spills are operated by the Ministry of Interior Air Police units which are not under the Coast Guard. With such divided responsibilities, authorities could not trace the source of an oil spill which polluted the coast of Lanyu island (an islet off Taiwan's southeastern coast) in July 2005. Chiu

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also criticized the lack of training of the emergency response team from TEPA, as well as the lack of a system for evaluating the damage done to the ecosystem.

¶5. (C) COMMENT. Although officials were on the scene of the oil spill promptly, they did not take immediate, effective action. As a result, the oil spill spread over a wide area and could still pose a threat to the surrounding marine life. Taiwan authorities appear unprepared to effectively meet the challenges resulting from such incidents. END COMMENT

YOUNG